

MINUTES

MANSFIELD ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN

Wednesday, May 31, 2006

Mansfield Town Hall, Employee Lounge

6:40pm - 8:4 pm

PRESENT: S. Baxter (staff), S. Daley, A. Bladen, L. Dahn, N. Hovorka, P. Wheeler, K. Paulhus, Ande Bloom, J. Goldman, K. Paulhus, B. Lehmann, D. McLaughlin, M. Dixon, L. Bailey, R. Leclerc

REGRETS: A. Blair, K. Grunwald, M.J. Newman, S. Patwa, K. Vallo and J. Buck

I. INTRODUCTIONS/MINUTES:

A. Introductions

B. Minutes of the previous meeting were discussed. An addition was made regarding the forum, that "every parent/child be contacted". This motion was made by Susan, seconded by Katherine, and was passed.

II. COMMUNICATIONS: Letter from Susan Daley

A. School Readiness Grant was due 5-19-06, submitted on 5-17-06. The center directors will fill slots with openings taken from the waiting list. 16 slots will be available at the 4 centers.

Sandy presented the policy on the waiting list. Susan's letter was included in the packet with the minutes. Susan explained that, in the past, she believed that each year, the slot allocations for each center were open for discussion and decision. She expressed a desire to have more than the current single slot allotted to Willow House.

The history of slot allocation was discussed. Sandy reviewed that each center requested a specific number of slots based upon enrollment projections by the directors. Last year all slots were assigned to a single center due to original lack of interest. The committee had felt that choice of center was important and slots should be available for different centers. Slots could be shared between centers as needed. The slots were then offered to each center and were available at all 4 Centers.

Currently, it is anticipated that slots will first be filled with returning children. When directors met, the majority opted to stay with the number of slots that they had for the past year. After returning children are enrolled, the waiting list is reviewed. This list is made up of children whose parents qualify for this funding based on yearly income and number in the family. Sandy reported that the family of a child on the waiting list is

offered a space in the slot at the center to which the slot is assigned. The family may choose to change programs or remain on the waiting list or take their name off of the waiting list, if they want to be at a different center than the one offering the slot.

A discussion ensued regarding the benefit of the funding for a slot to follow the child (a family would select a program and the money would go to that center) or the child to follow the funding (the situation at present).

Jane requested clarification. "When do we have to indicate which centers have what number of slots?" Sandy replied that this information is not reported to the state.

A discussion ensued regarding policy vs. procedure, and the need to have a way to arbitrate a disagreement. Becky reported that the current way of allocating slots has worked for the past 8 years, but clarification now appears to be necessary. Jane indicated that a policy should be put into place for next year; this should indicate how the waiting list is used during the year and how slots are assigned in September of each new year. There was also discussion as to whether Sandy and Kevin should have voting rights in this matter.

Katherine recalled previous discussions. This included issues about whether money should follow the child, whether Discovery Depot would be willing to take all the slots, the advantages of this as it would be easier to administrate & disadvantages that it doesn't provide family choice. Jane indicated that it would be important to correct this procedure to clarify the number of slots/center; the waiting list; how long can children be on the list; the number of centers involved. A committee (special school readiness task force) to consider these issues will be formed and these issues will be further discussed at the next meeting. Volunteers for this committee are: Susan, Katherine, Louise, Anne, Lisa, Jane, MaryJane, Kevin and Sandy.

MAC members discussed issues which should be considered.

Becky – Regarding Susan's concerns, can corrections be made for this year.

Sandy – We can't say how many slots will be filled; the deadline is Monday, 6/5/06.

Jane – If all slots are filled, we cannot do anything for this year.

Lisa – All centers are filled for July & August for CCC, in September open spaces may be available.

Anne – Allocation is important; if a center gives up a slot, will it be returned to that center if it is needed?

Also slots are different for school day vs. school year.

Pam – Slot allocations do not get reported to the state.

Sandy – The amount of money is \$105,000 for each of the 5 years.

The committee needs to address the allocation policy taking into account: disagreement about the number of slots for each center, how to resolve (policy vs. arbitrator). A discussion about the policy needs to address disagreement protocol, number of slots, 60/40 splits, # centers included and whether arbitration is needed.

Susan expressed the wish that a family at a center be allowed to remain at that center – this would be possible if the money followed the child. If a child is on the waiting list, then the money would be allotted to the center of the family's choice. Currently, centers fill their slots with their own children, then the waiting list is accessed.

MAC is committed to having further discussion and recognizes the need for a policy. Jane motioned that we set up a task force to present the issues and propose policies related to: allocation of slots (# centers in/out of Mansfield), waiting list issues (including time on the waiting list), diversity, grievance policies, 60/40 economic split, and special needs. Information may be obtained from other communities if such policies exist. Louise seconded the motion. Rachel advised that we may wish to review the situation so that we may avoid monies not be used. Anne questioned who is responsible to place a child on the waiting list – the directors may, but the family is ultimately responsible.

III. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Susan informed the group that the waiting list was changed in regards to using two children to determine income. On the new application, the formula to determine whether the family would qualify was removed. Sandy was not aware that the procedure was changed. SRA has formula; TAA council needs to have a policy. Sandy will check and let the directors know what the current policy is in regards to the second child in care.

IV. PROGRAM UPDATES: Update on the Discovery Action Plan

- A. Sandy distributed the update and a letter from David Nee. She reviewed areas which need to be worked on. Activities at Northwood Apts, Fun Fair, and Community Forums about Kindergarten are all activities which increase parent involvement. Sandy suggested that the council work in small groups on these topics, specifically discussing ways to increase parent involvement.

Updates:

MAC has sponsored two forums, neither was well attended. There is a call into the Rell campaign office requesting that Jodi Rell be available to our community before the November elections. Louise offered use of the library program rooms for future use, as well as advertisement options. Jane suggested that we asked back whoever is the Democratic candidate. Becky talked about the League of Women Voters Candidates' Night and that the council consider collaborating with other local groups (i.e. Democratic Town Committee). It was noted that the MAC committee cannot be affiliated with only one of the political parties. There has been a very positive response to the trifold MAC flyer created by Nancy Hovorka.

Jane reported that the Provost Council has disbanded. It is now a "work-life committee" which will address childcare issues eventually. Jane will find out the official name of this group.

A small group has formed at Northwood Apts.

Bethany reported that a parenting course was offered with Ruth Freeman. This was a 7-week course for children, siblings and parents, offering childcare and food. The group met at Discovery Depot and a variety of topics were presented. This was paid for by a grant from Generations/Willimantic. There is currently a waiting list for another course. Bethany noted that a shorter course might be a way to extend this, with the option to repeat the course. She will discuss this with Ruth Freeman. A Summer group "Positive Parenting" is enrolling with Ruth. Information is in the packets distributed.

Ande, Registered Dietician who is a Health consultant to the Eastern Highland Health District presented information about sun safety training and noted that "Healthy Hearts" dining guidelines. Services are available to families in the district.

Sandy announced a leadership-training day offered by Graustein on 6-16-06, from 9-3pm. She will be attending and is looking for anyone else who would like to attend.

- A. Small Group discussions report -outs
- B. Community forum about kindergarten
Offered as a recap of what has happened in full day kindergarten in the school year 2005-2006. This will be an opportunity to bring together all families (half day and full day). Questionnaires may be used. Issues raised include the need to include all families, advertising, curriculum issues of half day vs. full day, where and when.

V. OLD BUSINESS

Northwood Apts

Many residents are graduate students and/or international students. There are two graduate students who are resident advisors. There are a total of 45 apartments; half have children. They have a community room and would like to develop activities. Also there is a need to find ways to connect with the school. These families are often non-English speaking and have no transportation.

There may be many community possibilities. Funding from international students group at UConn may be available. Parks and Recreation offers a 50%/90% fee waiver. Louise reported that a diverse group of families attending Friday morning library Family Story Hour. The group can be large, averaging 50-60 people. It was questioned whether Mansfield has a van which could be made available to transport families to this.

Fun Fair: This will be discussed at the next meeting.

VI. NEXT MEETING – 6/28/06, NO MEETING JULY, 8/23/06

Meeting Adjourned 8:40pm

Respectfully submitted,
Donna McLaughlin (interim secretary)